When the West was Young, Higginbotham Old Kamoose

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"In spite of our long, tiresome journey, "Polly" drove through the town with quite a flourish of trumpets, the perspiring jaded animals being able to muster a lively gallop, when we drew up, with a sudden jerk, in front of the celebrated Macleod Hotel.

This famous or infamous hostel was kept by a remarkable charcter whose name was Harry Taylor but who was better known throughout the country by the opprobrious cognomen "Old Kamoose" (Squaw Thief). When asked by a visitor when he came to the West he replied, "When Chief Mountain (9,055 ft.) was a hole in the ground." He had the questionable distinction of being the first arrest of the North West Mounted Police. He was taken in charge with a four*horse team loaded with tins of alcohol, and the whole was confiscated and "Kamoose" promptly jailed. He never forgave the police for this and had few pleasant things to say of Colonel Macleod. In fact, nothing that he ever said of him in my presence was printable.

After being assigned to a room, partitioned from the others, as usual at that time, by factory*cotton, I made an investigation of the place. Immediately under the sign "Macleod Hotel" was a large sketch in black of a man's head at which was po nted a revolver, together with the enigmatic inscription: "No Jawbone" This, I afterwards ascertained was a variation of the Western motto: "In God we trust**all others cash."

Within the main entrace of the hotel was a general washroom, with a row of graniteware basins, also that ubiquitous and obnoxious institution*- the roller towel. After observing some en with bloodshot eyes and scrofulous skin making use of it, I decided to perform my ablutions elsewhere.

Some years after this, when Kamoose employed a Chinaman as a general factotum, the late Rev. Dr. Robertson, the well*known Superintendent of Missions for the Presbyterian Chu ch, arriv ng after a long, dusty drive,

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proceeded to remove some of the grime from his face and hands, but on looking up was appalled at the colour of the linen. Summoning the China boy he said, "John, what month is this?" To which he replied, "Thinkee August" "Well," said the doctor, "this is the May towel." "Ha! Ha' velly good," said John, seeing the po nt as he laughingly disappeared and presently returned with an immaculate drying cloth.

Kamoose's answer to one man who put up a protest was, "Twenty men have dried themselves on that towel and you are the first son*of-a-gun to complain." That was supposed to settle it.

On the walls of the lobby (sic) were various notices of meetings, nearly all written in ink, but there was one written on two sheets of foolscap which particularly attracted my attention, namely:

MACLEOD HOTEL RULES AND REGULATIONS

(Adopted unanimously by the Proprietor, September 1, 1882, A.D.)

Guests will be provided with breakfast and dinner, but must rustle their own lunch.

Spiked boots and spurs must be removed at night before retiring.

Dogs are not allowed in the Bunks, but may sleep underneath.

Candles, hot water and other luxuries charged extra, also towels and soap.

Towels changed weekly. Insect Powder for sale at the bar.

Crap, Chuck Luck, Stud Horse Poker and Black Jack games are run by the management. Indians and niggers charged double rates.

Special Rates to "Gospel Grinders" and the "Gambling Perfesh."

Every known fluid (water excepted) for sale at the bar.

A deposit must be made before towels, soap or candles can be carried to rooms. When boarders are leaving, a rebate will be made on all candles or parts of candles not burned or eaten.

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Two or more persons must sleep in one bed when so requested by the proprietor.

Not more than one dog allowed to be kept in each single room.

Baths furnished free down at the river, but bathers must furnish their own soap and towels.

No kicking regarding the quality or quantity of meals will be allowed; those who do not like the provender will get out, or be put out.

Assaults on the cook are strictly prohibited.

Quarrelsome or boisterous persons, also those who shoot off without provocation guns or other explosive weapons on the premises, and all boarders who get killed, will not be allowed to remain in the House.

When guests find themselves or their baggage thrown over the fence, they may consider that they have received notice to quit.

Jewelry and other valuables will not be locked in the safe. This hotel has no such ornament as a safe.

The proprietor will not be accountable for anything.

In case of FIRE the guests ~~will~~ are requested to escape without unnecessary delay.

The BAR in the Annex will be open day and night. All Day drinks, 50 cents each; Night drinks, $1.00 each. No Mixed Drinks will be served except in case of death in the family.

Only regularly registered guests will be allowed the special privilege of sleeping on the Bar Room floor.

Guests without baggage must sleep in the vacant lot, and board elsewhere until their baggage arrives.

Guests are forbidden to strike matches or spit on the ceiling, or to sleep in bed with their boots on.

No cheques cashed for anybody. Payment must be made in Cash, Gold Dust, or Blue Chips.

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Saddle horses can be hired at any hour of the Day or Night, or the next day or night if necessary.

Meals served in own rooms will not be guaranteed in any way. Our waiters are hungry and not above temptation.

To attract attention of waiters or bell boys, shoot a hole through the door panel. Two shots for ice water, three for a deck of cards, and so on.

All guests are requested to rise at 6 a.m. This is imperative as the sheets are needed for tablecloths.

No tips must be given to any waiters or servants. Leave them all with the proprietor, and he will distribute them if it is considered necessary.

Everything Cash in Advance. Following Tariff subject to change:

Board**$25.00 per month.

Board and Lodging--$50.00 per month, with wooden bench to sleep on.

Board and Lodging--$60.00 per month, with bed to sleep on.

A Chicago publication--Heart and Hand--had a number of subscribers in the foothills, and in some cases an extensive correspondence developed with some of the heart-hungry, love-lorn beauties who advertised in its columns. Matches were actually made by this means. How they turned out might be another story. One rancher, whose persuasiveness in letter-writing brought a young lady from the United States to the nearest railway station to his home--some sixty-five miles or more distant--nearly lost her through the attentions given by other men, due to his tardy arrival. She, however, was "playing safe" as in the event of his, or her disappointment, she thus had other strings to her bow, also beaux to her string.

Even officers of the North-West Mounted Police were not immune from the contagion; in one case the red-coated wooer took ample precautions against being "gold-bricked". Perched on a hillside within measureable distance of the railway station, and provided with a powerful pair of binoculars, he watched the unsuspecting damsel step from the train. Scanning her minutely, from top to toe, as she paced the platform, he dispatched his orderly with a note of regret, also sufficient funds to cover her return journey. Later on he "landed" a highly-accomplished lady--history does not relate whether the latter was informed of his previous adventure.

pp. 9....."A sturdy pioneer from Ontario who arrived in Winnipeg in 1877, states in a letter....'The winters following, of '79, '80, '82 and '83 were the coldest I can remember in the West.

pp. 98...."The winter of 1884 was short and severe. I had been warned in the early fall to prepar for cold weather, so I chinked all open spaces between the logs of my shack with mud, purchased a large syndicate coal stove, extra blankets, and a "cast" (rejected) buffalo coat, which had been issued to the Mounted Police and for which I paid four dollars. The latter was short, made especially for riding, was windproof, and with an extra high collar was hard to beat in the sub-zero weather. In the month of December, 1884, the lowest temperature on record in the Territories was reached. I had two excellent thermo eters, one a Negretti and Zambra, which registered fifty-six below zero Fahrenheit and this was confirmed by the instruments at the barracks. On the same day, Sunday, December 21st, the thermometer on the Saskatchewan River registered sixty-two below. On the night in question a pail of water placed on a chair within a foot of a stove, which was kept going all night, was found in the morning to be frozen solid, and a Mounted Policeman had two toes frozen while he was in bed.

While speaking of low temperatures, I might state that on Jan. 30, 1893, we experimented with various materials: mercury was frozen solid as were coal-oil, red nk and whiskey, and brandy was thickened to the consistency of syrup. At Dunmore Junction, two C.P.R. locomotives failed to move one ordinary caboose.

.....On the prairie the snow was so deep that when at lenght the Cinooks began to blow, the flat country became a vast lake--former dry depressions, lake-beds, etc., being filled to overflowi g.

As illustrations of remarkably sudden changes from cold to heat, or vice versa, the following may be cited:

The Annual Ball given by the North-West Mounted Police at Macleod on New Year's Eve, 1884, was attended by townsfolk and settlers from near and far. The weather was bitterly cold--thirty-four degrees or more below zero--and continued so throughout the night. At seven o'clock the next morning we were awakened by the sound of water running from the roof and down the chimney, and looking out on the barracks square, we were surprised to see the constables going about in shirt-sleeves, when but a few hours previously they had been clad in furs. The temperature had risen more than sixty-five degrees in a few hours. Precisely the reverse took place the following year at Lethbridge when the first Ball was given by the citizens in the Company's boarding-house. The month of December had been very balmy. We played baseball on Christmas Day on the "Square", now the beautiful Galt Gardens, and the maximum temperature for that day was fifty-eight degrees Fahrenheit. Great preparations had been made for the above event, people had been invited from Macleod, Pincher Creek and Medicine Hat. Those from the West were provided against all contingencies but those from the 'Hat, having come by rail, neglected these precautions and arrived in almost summer finery. While the ball was in progress, a north wind sprang up, and in two or three hours the mercury fell seventy degrees--from forty above to thirty below zero. The reception committee, headed by George Houk, an old-timer of 1866, made a raid upon the stocks of Bentley's and I.G. Baker & Company's general stores, and returned to the scene with a wagon-load of blankets of brilliant colours, and our guests from the East made their home journey in safety as well as comfort.

Although the winter of .886-87 was one of great severity, it was followed by a year of remarkable mildness. I played lawn tennis out-of-doors during a portion of each and every month of the year 1888.

Any account of the winders in Alberta would be incomplete without a description of that phenomenon known as the Chinook, which comes down from mountains crowned with perpetual snow and ice, as a summer wind in the midst of winter and transforms an atmosphere of bitter cold into balmy spring, luring cattle from hudling about buildings and haystacks to roam the grass-covered ranges.

The wind is not peculiar to Alberta. In Switzerland it is known as the Fohn, and by other names in other portions of the globe, but its effects are observed wherever masses of moist air are carried over a mountain range. My good friend, Mr. F.W. Godsal, experienced it in Ceylon but "most strikingly" in New Zealand, where in the south island the Canterbury plains are bounded on the west by a high range of mountains, just as Alberta is bounded on the west by the Rockies." He states that "while staying with some friends a few years ago at the foot of this New Zealand mountain range, an arch of cloud appeared in the west, similar to the 'Chinook arch' in Alberta, and the people at once exclaimed, 'See the arch! We shall have a warm wind today.'

"Chinook winds do not come through mountain passes, as is sometimes ignorantly supposed, but over the mountains at a great height, depositing their moisture as rain or snow on the mountain tops."

Meteorologists claim that masses of moist air passing over the icy peaks rapidly condense and come under pressure as they descend. This causes them to increase in temperature at the rate of about one degree F. for every 183 feet, and by the time they reach the foothills at the base of the mountains, where it is the warmest, they attain a maximum temperature of about seventy-five degrees F., and having lost most of their moisture, they melt and absorb with amazing rapidity any snow which may be lying on the range. I have frequently seen from one to two feet of snow disappear within twelve hours, leaving scarcely a pool behind. The Chinook's influence sometimes is felt for hundreds of miles eastward.

When the West was Young, Higginbotham MOUNTIES

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....."the first to sign up in November, 1873, in the old stone building at Fort Garry: Griesbach, Neale, Steel, Antrobus, Belcher, McIllree, Walker, Harper, Maunsell and La Bell. These "Old Originals" were joined in June, 1874 by six troops of fity officers and men, three hundred in all. The had travelled from Toronto to Fargo, North Dakota, by rail, where, after putting their wagons together, they continued the journey to Dufferin, Manitoba, whence the great trek across the plains began.

....."When these 300 troopers set out across the "Great Lone Land" for an uncertain destination, somewhere this side of the Rocky Mountains, there were not more than one hundred white people west of Winnipeg. Not a map of the entire region existed. One of the subalterns, Walker, who had taken a course in military drawing was detailed by Commissioner French to sketch the route of march. The half-breed guides employed were unreliable, none haveing been west of the Cypress Hills; the Blackfeet and Cree Indians, numbering twelve thousand in all, were inimical and suspicious of the intentions of the red-coats, or "pony soldiers" as they called them.

During the early stages of the march they were tortured by mosquitoes later by flies of various species, and finally by lice (the latter acquired from a former Indian camping-ground). They were delayed by detours around and through sloughs, lakes and swift-flowing rivers, by stampedes of their horses, caused by terrific thunderstorms, by a shortage of rations for both man and beast, the prairies having been eaten bare by a plague of grasshoppers, by countless thousands of buffalo which harassed them and frequently disputed the right of way, by the illness of heart-sick and weary men and horses, and worst of all, by a scarcity of water. Even that which they found was almost undrinkable, owing to its alkalinity.

One of the most critical experiences during the trek across the plains in 1874 was the great stampede, which almost set them completely afoot.

The Force invariably pitched their camp in the form of a hollow squar : the covered wagons formed three sides and the tents of the officers and men the fourth. One dark night, shortly after their arrival at Dufferin, approximately thirty miles norty of the internationsl border, a severe electrical storm came suddenly up. Three hundred horses, crazed by thunder and lightning, made a wild dash for freedom and galloped madly between and over the tents. As they rushed past, Sub-Inpsector Walker and a few of the men, with great courage, as well as presence of mind, seized and mounted some frightened chargers and followed through the storm upon the heels of the fear-stricken band. They rode desperately for hours and eventually caught up with the laggards of the stampede. Walker states that thrice he changed mounts, and, having overtaken the leaders, turned them northward. At daybreak he found that he was twenty miles south of the international line and not far from Grand Forks, North Dakota.

.....I have observed these "Riders of the Plains" on dress parades and fatigues, quenching prairie fires and sounding out the fords of swift-flowing rivers, carrying mail to outlying settlers, showing the newcomer the way to his homestead, teaching the red men the virtues of honesty, work, temperance and peace, handling the "bad man" and the violently insame, quelling strikes and riots, searching for lost travellers , aiding the rancher in finding his livestock, keeping tab on the whiskey smiggler, the narcotic drug pedlar, the gambler, the violater of game laws as well as those who took liberties with the decalogue, and always did the Mounted act with quietness, tact and efficiency.

Meanly paid, they must have been subjected to the severest temptations by the moneyed representatives of the Powers of Darkness--and these were legion. The remarkable thing is that their multifarious duties were so faithfully and effic ently performed.

.....In 1884-1885 when I camped beneath its (Fort Macleod) sheltering timbers, Superintendent Cotton endeavoured to protect this historic place from fire and vandalism by placing a small detachment there. This was composed of Staff-Sergeant Horner and Constables Herron and Parker. All three were more or less conspicuous among their comrades: Horner, for his famous ride with despatches on "Caesar", Herron for his association with Inspector Francis Jeffrey Dickens, son of the great English novelist, and Parker, who was known as "The Lost Mounted Policeman" and whose adventurous trip is described in the following ballad from incidents related to me by him in 1884.

THE LOST MOUNTED POLICEMAN

The police camp was on the St. Mary's River and, some miles below, Lee's Creek joined it, forming a Y. The directions given were: "Cross Lee's Creek and go on till you come to the river, then follow it till you find the camp." But it was an easy matter to lose the trail in the snow, and the river was crossed below the fork under the impression it was only the creek. Beyond was nothing but a "waste howling wilderness" and over this the Mounted Policeman wandered a full week, famished, snow-blind, hopeless. When flund at last by the driver of the Fort Benton mail stage, he completely gave up and fell inert fro his horse, strength and energy both failing when he knew he was safe.

"Come, Parker, 'tis a bitter day,
Though March winds make you shiver;
But saddle with what speed you may
And take this to the river.

"And come and have a bite of food,
Before you ride away,
For you will need a good square meal,
To keep the cold at bay.

"I willingly would go myself
But I know not the road;
And travel is so bad just now,
I'd make too great a load.

"But you are light, and young and strong,
With warm blood in your veins,
'Twill take the numbing cold a while
To make you drop the reins.

"So rustle now, my bonny lad,
These days have little light,
And this despatch must reach the camp
Before the fall of night."

Thus spake my Sergeant, and for me,
'Twas only to obey;
But well I knew what risk I ran
In riding out that day.

The hurried dinner soon was done,
And Custer had hisfeed;
And having put the saddle on,
I mounted on my steed.

Adieus all said, away we sped
As fast as we co ld go,
But winds from the gaunt Rockies' steep
Had filled the trail with snow.

Still on we plodded, and the trail
I patiently did see ,
Until at last I saw ahead,
A welcome sight--Lee's Creek.

"Soon I will reach St. Mary's brink;
It can't be very long
Before I see my comrades' fire,
And hear their merry song."

But ah, my lad, false hopes are yours,
The river you have crossed;
Out on the prairie's waste you are,
And worse than that, are lost.

On, on we went till o'er us fell,
The sable robes of night;
Watchful, but weary, down I lay,
And waited for the light.

I took the saddle off his back
And let poor Custer go;
Then up and down I tramped to form
A doffin in the snow.

My ears were frozen, so I wrapt
The blanket round my head;
And taking one last look around
I sought my snowy bed.

The wind was roaring overhead,
The snow fell thick and fast;
The dreadful howl of prairie wolves
Was borne upon the blast.

Even with the howls of wind and wolf
Sweet slumber came to me;
I dreamt of banquest, lordly feasts,
And friends no more to see.

The tempest passed, and morning's sun
Shed its bright beams around;
And found me laid in stately pomp
Upon a narrow mound.

The ground was bare about my bed,
Custer stood at my feet,
For he had scraped the snow away
In search of grass to eat.

Though hungry still, we started out
The long losttrail to find;
Naught but the snow was seen before,
And the vast waste behind.

The prairie looked so weirdly red,
Such strange thoughts crossed my mind,
Vague dreadful things now made me feel
That I was struck snow-blind.

No shipwreckt seamen, far from shore,
Beneath an aggry sky,
Could have less hope of being saved,
Nor suffer more than I.

My throat all parched from eating snow,
Face blistered with the sun,
Hungry, halffrozen, blind and lost
Helpless and hopeless, done!

In fancy, I could so etimes see
A flock of grazing sheep,
And while I saw them famished wolves
Upon their necks would leap.

Again, I sa smiggler's camp,
Which looked to me quite near;
But as I turned my horse that way
It seeed to disappear.

And then there came a pretty sight,
Which gave me comfort too;
I saw, in evening's light, the form
Of her I used to woo.

Fair as the ~~[illegible]~~ flowerets,
And lovely as the rose,

Fair as the sunny flowerets,
And lovely as the rose,
A heavenly smile lit up her face,
And gentled all my woes.

But oh, those joys were transient,
The dread reaction came;
I longed for death or to be found
To me it was the same.

Day followed day 'til six were past,
And still no hlep was nigh,
When in the snow, up on my knees;
I called to God on high.

My prayer was heard, an answer came--
God's mercies never fail-
For I could hear and faintly see
The coming Benton Mail.

When found, at last, my strength gave out,
Friends took me from my steed;
Kind helping hands were soon at work,
Supplying every need.

When nearing Fort Macleod at last,
I raised my head to see;
My comrades gathered 'round the gate,
They cheered me lustily.

One day, when in the hospital;
Though only bones and skin,
They brought poor Custer to the door,
But could not bring him in.
"Come, Custer, come," I cried aloud;
He neighed, then eyed the place,
And walking up to where I lay,
He gently licked my face.

"O noblest of a faithful race!-
The horse that brought me through,
If I should lose myself again,
Send me a friend as true!"